

**STATEMENT OF
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**Before the
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, RECREATION AND PUBLIC
LANDS
COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
on
June 6, 2002
Concerning**

H.R. 4620 – America’s Wilderness Protection Act

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am Abigail Kimball, Associate Deputy Chief, National Forest System, USDA Forest Service. My comments today represent the views of the Department on H.R. 4620, “America’s Wilderness Protection Act”.

For reasons I will detail in my testimony, the Department has some concerns with this bill, but the Department would like to work with the Committee to resolve these concerns as the bill is considered.

H.R. 4620, “America’s Wilderness Protection Act”

H.R. 4620, America’s Wilderness Protection Act, would accelerate the wilderness designation process by establishing a timetable for the completion of wilderness studies on Federal lands, and for other purposes.

The bill states, “the establishment of a timetable for the completion of wilderness studies would facilitate the wilderness designation process by supplying a timeframe within which Congress must act.”

Section 3(a) of the bill, directs all areas with Wilderness Study Area status on the date of the enactment of this Act would be released from Wilderness Study Area status on the earlier of the following:

- (1) The date that the Secretary of the Interior or the Secretary of Agriculture, as appropriate, determines that the area is not suitable for wilderness designation.
- (2) 10 years after the date of the enactment of this Act.
- (3) The date that the area is designated as wilderness by an Act of Congress.

Section 3(b) of H.R. 4620, directs that any area that is given Wilderness Study Area status after the date of enactment of this Act shall be released from Wilderness Study Area status on the earlier of the following:

- (1) The date that the Secretary of the Interior or the Secretary of Agriculture, as appropriate, determines that the area is not suitable for wilderness designation.
- (2) 10 years after the date that the area was given Wilderness Study Area status.
- (3) The date that the area is designated as wilderness by an Act of Congress.

Section 3(c) of the bill states any area released from Wilderness Study Area status shall revert to the land use status such area had immediately before the area was given Wilderness Study Area status and shall not be studied again regarding wilderness designation. The Administration is currently formulating a position on this provision and we look forward to working with the Committee on this issue.

The Wilderness Act of 1964 provided for the study of certain National Forest System lands for wilderness suitability. The study of Forest Service Primitive Areas has long since been completed. Wilderness suitability of National Forest System lands has been examined in RARE I, RARE II, as well as many Land and Resource Management Plans. Although the President and the Secretary may recommend that certain areas be designated wilderness, Congress reserves the authority to designate areas as wilderness. Congress may direct the study of specific areas through specific wilderness legislation.

In conclusion, the Department is committed to working cooperatively with the Committee to identify and secure for the American public, the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness that can be used and enjoyed by current and future generations.

This concludes my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.